St. Norbert
Heritage Park.
Manitoba

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The Creation of St. Norbert Heritage Park

St. Norbert Heritage Park is situated at the scenic and historic junction of the La Salle and Red rivers. The park is being developed by the Province of Manitoba and will be partially open to the public by mid-1984.

The creation of a heritage park began when the Fort Garry Historical Society saved the 1871 Turenne House and the 1889 Bohémier House from demolition and donated them to the Province of Manitoba. The land was acquired by the Province with financial assistance from the Canada-Manitoba Agreement for Recreation and Conservation on the Red River Corridor (ARC). Additional ARC funding has been provided to restore the Bohémier House and to provide for site landscaping and interpretive displays.

Other developments planned for the park are reconstructions of an early Indian camp site, the 1811-1821 Charette House, and a Métis Farm of the 1850s. The restoration of the 1857 home of the Honourable Pierre Delorme, and the reconstruction of the 1858 and 1874 Grey Nuns' Convents are also projected.

When these historically significant buildings are opened they will depict the evolution of a natural habitat used for hunting and camping by native peoples to a French-speaking agricultural community of the pre-World War I period. The development of St. Norbert is described in this brochure.

Proposed Site Plan For
St. Norbert Heritage Park
St. Norbert, Manitoba
To be opened in 1984

1. *Grey Nuns' Convent*, 1874
2. *Ojibwa Encampment*
3. *Jean-Baptiste Charette House and Stopping Place ca.* 1811
4. *Métis Farm ca.* 1850
5. *Pierre Delorme Farm*, 1857
6. *Grey Nuns' Convent* 1858
7. *Joseph Turenne House*, 1871
8. *Benjamin Bohémier Farm*, 1889

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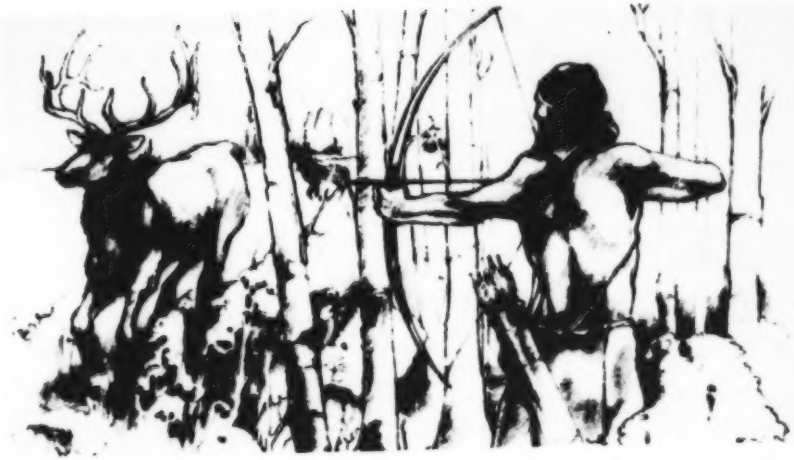
The region near the mouth of the eastwardly flowing La Salle River may have been occupied by human beings as early as 6000 B.C. An ancient *Palaeo-Indian* spearhead was found near a small stream that flows into the La Salle at St. Norbert. This artifact, made of a type of stone that occurs naturally in the Canadian Shield to the east, probably represents the seasonal movement of hunters from the forest to the grasslands to hunt buffalo.

At another site, this one on the Red River not far from the mouth of the La Salle, a type of prehistoric pottery known as *Blackduck* was found along with the bones of wildfowl, rabbit, beaver, muskrat, martin, otter, buffalo, elk and several species of fish. The findings, radiocarbon-dated to 780 A.D., bear witness to the varied diet of these early peoples. They also suggest that the confluence of the La Salle and the Red rivers was frequented on a temporary, seasonal basis in a period of considerable population growth made possible in large part by the use of the bow and arrow. This and other technological innovations allowed the small mobile bands to exploit a wide range of wild resources through plant harvesting, fishing and hunting.

It was during this period that peoples inhabiting the Red River region began participating in extensive trade networks which gave them access to exotic shell, copper and stone items from as far away as the Great Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico and the West Coast. It is known that the migratory bands would, at certain times of the year come together to trade, talk, and celebrate. The archaeological remains found in the vicinity of St. Norbert Heritage Park suggest the La Salle River junction area may have been used for such purposes as well.

A Blackduck hunter stalking elk
ca 800 A.D.



Historic Resources Branch

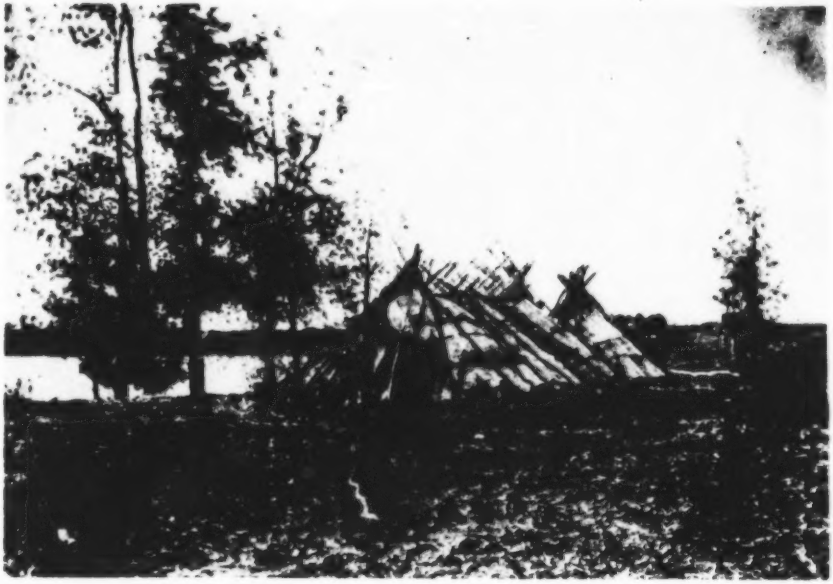
Courtesy Leigh Syms

Partially re-constructed 1200 year old Blackduck pot found near the forks of the Red and La Salle rivers

Between 1600 and 1800 at least three Native groups, the Assiniboine, the Cree and the Ojibwa (Saulteaux), inhabited the countryside around what is now St. Norbert.

During the summer of 1800, the fur trader, Alexander Henry the Younger, travelled southward on the Red River to a spot near the junction of the La Salle and Red rivers where he and his native companions made camp. Henry's destination was the mouth of the Pembina River near the forty-ninth parallel. His journals contain the earliest written account of the confluence of the La Salle and Red rivers. Henry's notes indicate the La Salle was the southern limit of a thickly wooded countryside which was overgrown with poplars and interspersed with small meadows. To the south lay the open prairies of the North American midwest. The La Salle River junction area had a year-round population of moose and deer and was also frequented by bison in the winter, making the banks of the river a good stopping place for food and shelter. There is some indication in Henry's journal that the Sioux, a rival tribe to Henry's Cree travelling companions, might be found as far north as the La Salle. This observation is supported by other historical accounts that the river was in the territory of the Cree-Assiniboine alliance which, around 1740, was joined by the Saulteaux to form a unified front against the much feared Sioux. In all probability, the well-treed banks of the La Salle were used as ambush sites. By the mid-nineteenth century the area of skirmishes and raids had shifted to the south, the La Salle becoming the uncontested boundary of the rival tribes.

Eventually the river was to serve as the *de facto* limit of concentrated habitation for the Red River Settlement and, later, the City of Winnipeg.



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Ojibwa encampment on the banks of the Red River ca. 1858

Noteworthy is the name *Rivière La Sale* which Henry used for the river in his journal. It was so named because of the bitter salty taste of its water which made it barely potable during certain periods of the summer. The river was also known as *La Rivière Salée* or more often as *La Rivière Sale*, the French adjective *sale* meaning dirty or foul. The nomenclature was used throughout the nineteenth century. English-speaking mapmakers such as Peter Fidler (1817, 1819) and Henry Youle Hind (1857) acknowledged the French name of the river, and offered *Stinking River* as a translation. Other cartographers such as Dominion Government surveyors used *River Salle* on their maps. This spelling was a phonetic rendering of the French *Rivière Sale*. It was not until 1883 and the establishment of the CPR's La Salle Station further upstream that the name of the river began to change to its modern variant. Although the French name *la rivière Sale* persists among local French-speaking residents the name *La Salle River* was officially adopted in 1975.

Historic Resources Branch

La Salle River near its confluence with the Red

Important as it was as a boundary and camp site the La Salle River was never the axis about which settlement clustered. During the early 1800s, however, it lent its name to the settlement which grew north and south along the banks of the larger Red River of which the La Salle was a tributary.

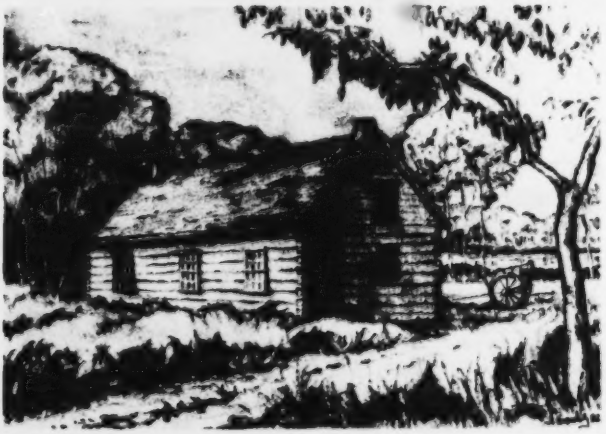
Tradition maintains that Jean-Baptiste Charette, a North West Company (NWCo) carpenter, was one of the first permanent settlers in the vicinity of the La Salle River perhaps living in the area as early as 1811. His house was situated on the west bank of the Red River about 1.5 kilometres below the mouth of the La Salle.

The development of a community took shape after 1821 when the fierce competition of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the NWCo for control of the fur trade ended. The rivalry had resulted in the proliferation of posts, numerous hostile clashes and a great expense of men and goods which was ruining business. In 1821, the companies united under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company, closed down redundant posts, and reduced their labour force by nearly two-thirds. Many of the released employees migrated to the agricultural settlement established by Lord Selkirk, centered at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. They began taking up lands along the banks of both rivers, gradually spreading to the south and to the west.

Near the south bank of the La Salle ran a buffalo trail for nearly fifty kilometres leading to the buffalo hunting grounds on the Grand Coteau du Missouri. Many of the discharged employees or *engagés* had been involved in the provisioning of the fur trade, taking part in the buffalo hunts on the prairies each spring and fall. Easy access to the trail from the La Salle River allowed the *engagés* to continue the livelihood they knew best. By 1825 the land along the Red River was occupied as far south as the La Salle. This southern tip of the Red River Settlement was occupied by a predominantly French-speaking population of partial Indian ancestry commonly known as Métis.

Paul Kane oil painting showing Métis hunting buffalo.

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University



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1-Baptiste Charette House, also used as a stopping place ca. 1811, demolished in 1952

Development of the Rivière La Sale Community, 1821-1856

The fledgling settlement grew slowly, allowing the character of the community to develop in a cohesive manner over several decades. The community remained predominantly French-speaking and Métis, with the inhabitants combining subsistence agriculture with seasonal boat brigade work for the HBC. Participation in the buffalo hunt remained an integral part of the community's life, the vicinity of the Red-LaSalle rivers being a rallying point for the buffalo hunters and their families who headed out to the plains each spring and fall. Although the residents spent many months away on the plains each year, most returned each fall to their river lot homes along the Red.

The small settlement was governed by the Council of Assiniboia set up by the HBC, but cultural and social life was much more directly influenced and shaped by the role of the Roman Catholic Church than the rule of the Council. Regular missionary activity had begun at *la mission de la rivière Sale* in the 1840s when one of the Grey Nuns from St. Boniface visited twice weekly to teach religion. Preparations for the construction of a church began in 1854. Three years later, the parish of St. Norbert was created, so named in honour of Joseph Norbert Provencher, the first Roman Catholic missionary to the Northwest and the first Bishop of St. Boniface.

Red River Freighter's boat

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Courtesy Archives de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface

Joseph Norbert Provencher 1787-1853

The elevation of the Rivière Sale mission to the status of a parish took place at a time when the Red River Settlement and the entire Northwest approached the end of an era. The tranquility of the annual routines of seed, buffalo hunt and harvest were gradually being affected as the agricultural frontiers of Canada and the United States began to lap up against the domains of the HBC. The easing of the settlement's isolation brought many benefits. With the more efficient trade links to the markets of North America, both the HBC and the free traders prospered. The settlement also profited in that formerly exotic items such as window glass and agricultural implements could be readily purchased.

By the 1850s, long brigades of the famous two-wheeled Red River carts began to appear along the Crow Wing and Pembina trails. The Pembina route southward from Fort Garry at the heart of the Red River Settlement, to St. Paul, Minnesota, at the head of the navigable Mississippi, passed through the river lots of St. Norbert. Proximity to the Pembina Trail thus gave many of the local residents the opportunity to actively engage in the carting and freighting business.

One inhabitant affected by this economic change was Pierre Delorme (1831-1912), a resident of Pointe Coupée, today St. Adolphe. Active as a bison hunter in his youth, Delorme became a prosperous farmer who also operated a stage coach way station in the family home. Delorme was to become a leading political figure in St. Norbert, as a supporter of Louis Riel, and later, as an elected member of Manitoba's first Legislature.

The end of economic isolation also brought with it speculations about the political future of the settlement. Rumours of the end of the HBC's monopoly in the Northwest, possible annexation to the United States, or a transfer of the territory to Canada became hotly debated issues. The controversy was fired more often than not by newcomers to Red River. The Ontario-born "Canada First" supporters, who began to arrive in the Red River Settlement in the late 1850s, wanted the Northwest opened up for agricultural settlement. Although a small group, their persistent criticisms of the old order won them notoriety among those in St. Norbert and elsewhere in the Red River Settlement who held their lands at the Company's sufferance.

Red River cart brigade ca 1858

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

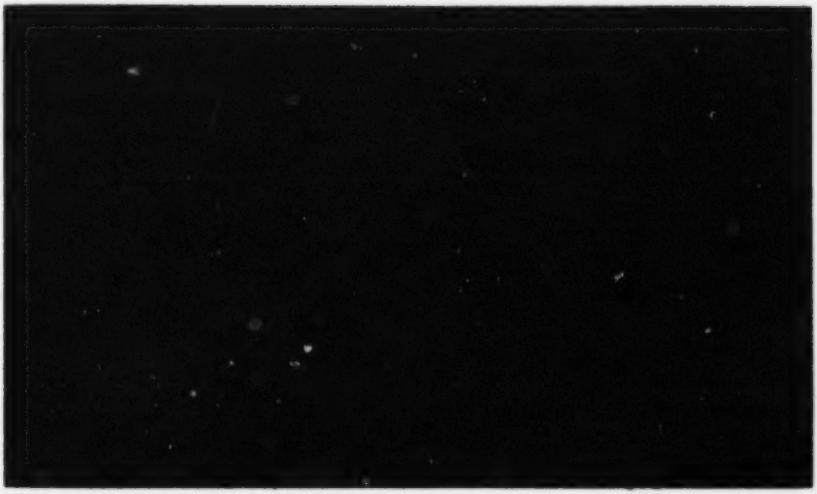
Historic Resources Branch

Pierre Delorme House 1857

Amidst these changes, St. Norbert, the third and the most extensive Catholic parish at Red River, took root. Stretching to the American border, St. Norbert was thinly populated by 700 inhabitants, but by 1857 the parish boasted a newly completed church which was located on the west bank of the Red River slightly north of the mouth of the La Salle. The church was made of wood and within its 27.4 by 10 metre churchyard walls stood the residence of the first parish priest, Father Jean-Marie Lestanc. During Lestanc's tenure the Grey Nuns' convent was established. The dwelling the nuns occupied in 1858 was a log building with a thatched roof located a few paces north of the church. In this sparsely furnished house, the sisters taught up to sixty children at one time. The goal of the Church was to educate the Métis daughters in the domestic arts as a means of encouraging a mode of living among the Métis different from that of the buffalo hunt. Lestanc's sojourn at St. Norbert ended in October 1860 when he was recalled to St. Boniface. He was replaced by Father Mestre whose efforts saw the establishment of the parish cemetery. Taken seriously ill, Mestre was in turn succeeded by Joseph Noël Ritchot, whose dedicated service to his parishioners lasted forty-three years.

When Father Ritchot arrived in St. Norbert in 1862, rumours of an impending transfer of the Northwest to Canada had created a general atmosphere of uneasiness. Ritchot faced the monumental task of ministering a parish inhabited by Métis whose livelihood, dependent on buffalo hunting and freighting, was being transformed by economic and political forces seemingly beyond local control. Ritchot's role in the community during this difficult time was not therefore restricted to religious instruction. As with his contemporaries in the Church, he favoured an agricultural way of life for the Métis, but after observing the arduous work and complex organization involved in a successful buffalo hunt he came to empathize with the Métis and their concerns to safeguard their culture. A friend and confidant of the Métis leader Louis Riel, the priest from St. Norbert loyally championed the Métis in the turbulent events of 1869-70, which brought years of rumour and uneasiness about the future of the Métis of Red River to a climax.

Grey Nuns Convent 1858



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Joseph Noel Ritchot, 1825-1905

St. Norbert and the Red River Resistance, 1869-1870

In the summer of 1869, prior to the legal transfer of the Northwest to Canada, a number of the Dominion's agents were already in Red River preparing the way for new settlers. In late June, a group of them were chased away from lands along the La Salle by Métis from St. Norbert who resented speculators so near their lands. The incident led to a 4 July meeting in St. Norbert where, under the leadership of Jean-Baptiste Tourond, the Métis decided to establish a system of patrols to deter speculators and squatters on what was considered Métis land. An incident on 11 October resulted in a Canadian survey team being physically prevented from running a baseline across the river lots of southwest St. Vital and northeast St. Norbert.

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

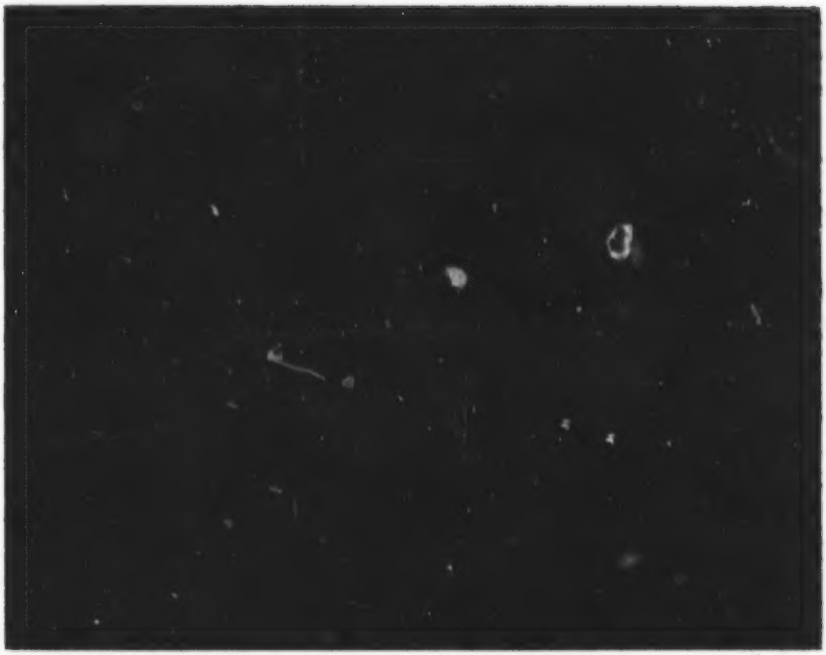
Métis farm (Picturesque Canada: *the country as it was and is/edited by George Monro Grant illustrated under the supervision of* L R O'Brien Toronto Belden [1882 vol 1)

Nine days later, a Métis council meeting in St. Vital struck a committee which organized the Métis along the militia-like lines of the buffalo hunting parties. Captains were elected and charged with leading their "soldiers" south to the American border to meet the Canadian-appointed Governor, William McDougall, and his party who were thought to be armed. The plan was altered at St. Norbert the next day. Instead of meeting McDougall in force, the Métis divided their troops into three groups under the leadership of the Nault brothers, André, Benjamin, and Baptiste. The largest, under André, set up a base camp on the south bank of the La Salle River at the point where the Pembina Trail crossed it. A barricade, traditionally known as *La Barrière*, was set up across the road. The other two parties took up positions near the present sites of Aubigny and St. Jean Baptiste. These two parties were to fall back on St. Norbert if McDougall ignored a diplomatic note which warned him not to proceed past the American frontier. At St. Norbert, he and his party were to be stopped by force of arms if necessary.

The warning, dated 21 October 1869 and signed by John Bruce and Louis Riel, simply told McDougall not to enter the Northwest without the "special permission" of the Métis.

Although McDougall received and heeded the note on 30 October, two of his party continued separately on their way to Fort Garry. They were stopped at St. Norbert on 1 November and escorted back to the American frontier.

The period between 20 October and 1 November were far from quiet at the St. Norbert base camp just west of the church. Within three days of the call to arms on 20 October, almost 100 men were camped near *La Barrière*. This gathering of men under arms greatly disturbed the more conservative elements of Red River, including a sizeable number of Métis. Throughout the week prior to the halting of two of McDougall's party, several private and official emissaries came to St. Norbert and attempted to dissuade the militant Métis from their course.



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

1874 *map of river lots St. Norbert showing:*

A *Parish church*
B *crossing of the Pembina Trail over the "River Salle" where La Barrière once stood*
C *Turenne House*
D *Charette House*

The most important of these meetings occurred on 27 October. After failing to convince Riel to abandon his course, the Council of Assiniboia asked William Dease and Roger Goulet to rally "as many of the more respectable of the French community" and with them go to St. Norbert in order to peaceably disperse the militants. Goulet declined but Dease, a resident of St. Norbert, attempted the mission. By the morning of the twenty-seventh, the Métis of the settlement had assembled at St. Norbert. Some came as partisans of the moderate faction and others came to bolster Riel's forces. It would appear that Father Ritchot played a very important role at this meeting by strongly supporting the stand of the militants, as he had done on similar occasions. Some twenty of Dease's original supporters went over to the militants while sixty more dispersed after remaining camped at the Charette stopping place for two or three days. Thus by the time McDougall reached Pembina, the leadership of Riel over the Métis had been solidified at St. Norbert.

On the second and third of November the "National Committee" of the Métis held a series of meetings and resolved to escalate their actions and seize the Canadian supplies in Winnipeg which had been purchased for the roadbuilding and survey crews. The roadbuilding crew was also ordered to terminate its work within the week. Furthermore, it was decided to set out from the camp at St. Norbert and occupy Fort Garry, thus controlling the entire Red River Settlement. This was done without firing a shot on the second of November. With the capture of the administrative centre, the heart of the Métis resistance shifted from St. Norbert to Fort Garry, where much of the remaining drama of the 1869-1870 resistance was played out. Nevertheless, St. Norbert's men controlled access to the colony at *La Barrière* and helped maintain a garrison at Fort Garry under the leadership of Tourond, Delorme and others.

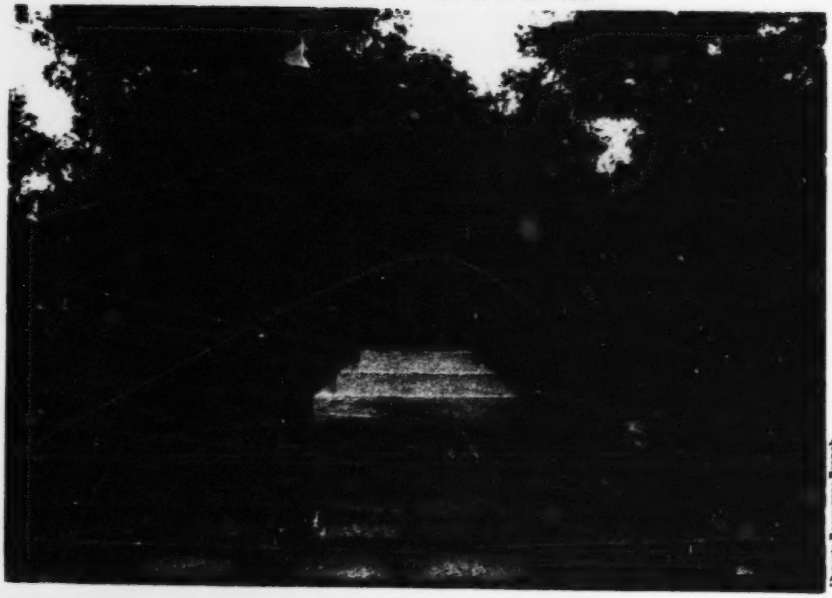
Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Riel and several of his Council and supporters. Standing—Charles Larocque, Pierre Delorme, Thomas Bunn, Xavier Page, Ambroise Lépine, Baptiste Tourond, Thomas Spence; Centre Row—Pierre Poitras, John Bruce, Louis Riel, W.B. O'Donoghue, François Dauphinais; Front Row—H.F. O'Lone, Paul Proulx

More important was the role played by Father Ritchot whose tenacity in face-to-face negotiations in Ottawa led to the passage of the *Manitoba Act* and the creation of Canada's first western province. Although there were two other negotiators from Red River, they were overshadowed by Ritchot. To avoid detection, Ritchot travelled via the United States but he was arrested in Ottawa on charges of complicity in the execution of Thomas Scott at Red River. The charges were soon dismissed for lack of evidence. Once free, his next hurdle was to secure official Canadian recognition for the delegation as emissaries of Riel's Provisional Government at Red River. Ritchot refused to open formal negotiations until recognition came in the form of a letter dated 26 April 1870.

The negotiations were long and difficult, but the Canadian government conceded provincial status and separate Catholic and Protestant schools. The Dominion withheld control of public lands. Ritchot countered this check by requesting a Métis reserve of 1,200,000 hectares. After much discussion, 560,000 hectares of reserved land was guaranteed. Following this phase of the negotiations, constant appeals for a written promise of amnesty for those involved in the resistance and the death of Scott were made by Ritchot. By 4 May, the question of amnesty still remained open. Finally, Ritchot settled for what he thought were iron-clad verbal assurances and returned to Red River where the agreement was endorsed by the residents.

La Barrière monument erected in 1906
located south of where the Pembina Highway
crosses the La Salle River



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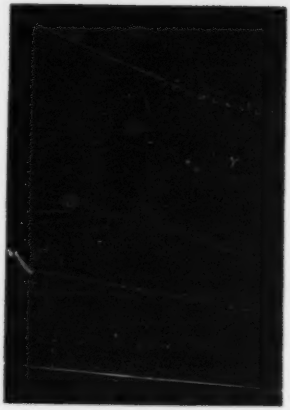

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Statue in Bon Secours chapel ca. 1872
symbolizing the triumph of the Métis
(smaller sphere) through Marian intervention

St. Norbert After the Creation of Manitoba, 1870-1905

With the creation of Manitoba in 1870 came an influx of immigrants from Ontario seeking good agricultural land. The newcomers, predominantly English-speaking and Protestant, were to transform the character of the Red River Settlement within a decade. The Métis of Red River were often unable to retain their lands or acquire those promised them due to revisions of the *Manitoba Act*. By the late 1870s, hundreds of the Métis moved to the Saskatchewan Valley while immigration from Ontario was on the increase. The Catholic clergy and French-speaking lay leadership of Manitoba responded to this cultural transformation by encouraging French Canadians from Québec and New England to settle on the lands formerly occupied by the Métis. These lands were often purchased from the Church which had acquired them from the Métis in order to keep them available for Catholic settlers.

Among the recruits were several young Québécois professionals who came West to help defend the French language and the Catholic faith. One of them, Joseph Turenne (1845-1920), settled in St. Norbert where he built, in 1871, a two storey log home north of the Grey Nuns' convent near the ferry crossing on the Red River. Turenne was to hold a number of public offices in St. Norbert from 1870 to 1882 before moving to St. Boniface.

Joseph Turenne House, built in 1871

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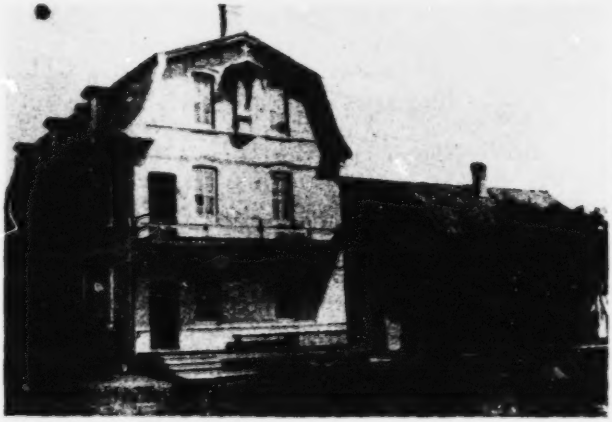


Courtesy Archives des Soeurs Grises de Montréal, Maison Provinciale, Saint-Boniface

St. Norbert Convent. The building on the right was built in 1874, demolished in 1937. The 1889 building on the left was incorporated into a larger 1904 structure

St. Norbert's proximity to Winnipeg and its prime agricultural land attracted many French Canadian families, among them that of Benjamin Bohémier (1848-1926), a lumber merchant from Ste-Anne-des-Plaines, Québec, who first came West to farm in 1883. On river lots 104-105, 1.5 kilometres north of the parish church, Bohémier constructed his handsome gambrel-roofed home which was completed in 1889 and continuously occupied by family descendants to 1973. Many of St. Norbert's current residents date their presence in the community to those French Canadians who arrived during the 1880s and 1890s rather than to the Métis. Nevertheless, a handful of Métis names remain.

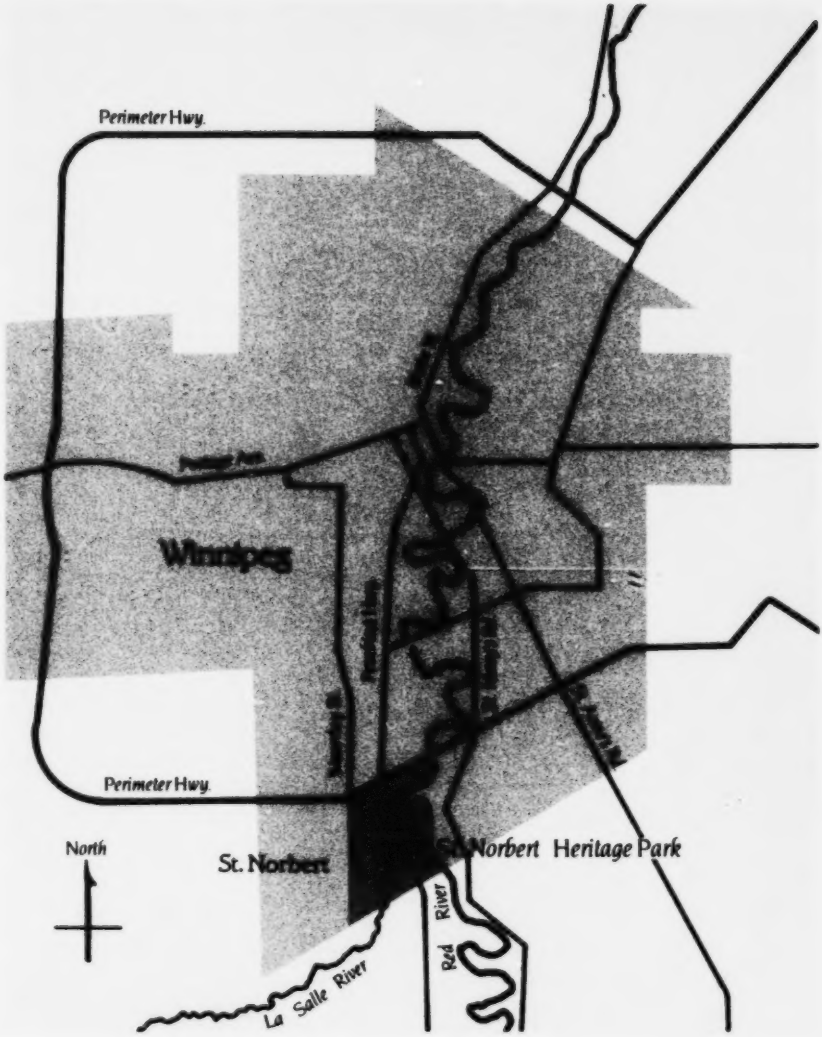
St. Norbert's physical appearance changed along with the shift in its population; homes of milled lumber replaced the log homes of earlier years. As the old log church was replaced by a more stately structure, the area immediately west of it was fast taking on the appearance of a hamlet. Merchants and tradesmen soon established shops nearby. Father Ritchot's efforts and generosity also succeeded in attracting two additional religious orders to the parish. The Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, or Trappists, arrived in 1892 and founded a monastery on land on the banks of the La Salle given to them by Ritchot and Archbishop Taché. Twelve years later, an orphanage operated by the Sisters of Mercy was established in the village, again on land donated by Father Ritchot. By the time of Ritchot's death in 1905, St. Norbert had been transformed from a Métis settlement dependent on the buffalo hunt to a French-speaking agricultural community endowed with numerous religious institutions and notable buildings.

Benjamin Bohémier family home built in 1889

Historic Resources Branch

Courtesy Mrs. Irene Joyal-Delisle

Bohémier threshing outfit at a neighbouring farmstead in the early 1900s


Perimeter Hwy.
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North
St. Norbert
St. Norbert Heritage Park
Red River
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POOR

QUALITY

ORIGINAL